

The Ultimate Challenge

By

Andrew Gingerich

Copyright 2009 Exploding
Goldfish Films, LLC

1201 Maple Street
Fort Collins, CO 80521

www.EXGfilms.com
andrew@exgfilms.com

(970) 219-0217

1

INT. HOME OFFICE - MORNING

1

Marshall Walters sits at his desk, a ledger open in front of him.

EILEEN (V.O.)

We have just been informed that entrepreneur Marshall Walters has gone missing, as reported by wife Abigail earlier this evening.

With a lighter, Walters sets the ledger on fire and tosses it in the wastebasket.

EILEEN (V.O.)

Walters was the founding force behind three successful high-tech firms, including Solomon Solutions, which employs 5,000 workers in the state.

Walters stuffs a large bundle of cash into his briefcase and leaves his office.

2

EXT. WALTERS HOUSE - MORNING

2

Walters exits his house carrying his briefcase and gets in the car.

EILEEN (V.O.)

He drew public scrutiny earlier this month Solomon announced that it would be re-stating its earnings for the last fiscal year, amid accusations of legal impropriety.

Walters starts his car and drives off.

DISSOLVE TO:

3

INT. TV STATION - EVENING

3

EILEEN ROBBIE sits at a news desk, speaking into a camera. An illuminated "ON THE AIR" sign hangs on the wall across from her.

EILEEN

Walters was last seen leaving his home in a blue Mitsubishi sedan on the morning of the 21st. Police have commenced a full-scale

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

EILEEN (cont'd)
investigation into the
disappearance, we'll have a full
story at ten. Thanks for listening,
I'm Eileen Robbie for Eyewitness 2
News.

The sign winks off and Eileen stands up.

Eileen's producer, EDDIE, enters from the control room.

EDDIE
Where you headed?

EILEEN
Howard's working on the Walters
thing, I thought I'd go talk to
him.

EDDIE
Okay, back here at ten.

EILEEN
Yeah.

4 INT. WALTERS HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

4

Walters' wife, ABIGAIL, sits in the living room. A
detective, HOWARD RADCLIFFE, sits next to her.

HOWARD
Mrs. Walters, I know there have
been a lot of accusations flying
around, I want to assure you that
our first and only priority is
bringing your husband home safely,
so I'm going to ask you again: Do
you have any idea where he might
have been headed?

ABIGAIL
He was going to work! I told you
that!

HOWARD
I know, ma'am, I just wondered if
you might have any idea where else
he might have been headed.

(CONTINUED)

ABIGAIL

He was going to work! Where else would he be going on a Tuesday morning?!

HOWARD

Okay. I'll give you a call if there are any developments.

Howard stands, shakes Abigail's hand, and exits.

Abigail stares at her hand, rubs it on the couch, stares at it, spits on it, rubs it on the couch, and stares at it again.

5 EXT. WALTERS HOUSE - NIGHT

5

Howard exits the Walters house. Eileen gets out of her car.

EILEEN

Hi, Howard!

Howard sighs.

HOWARD

I can't comment on this one, Eileen.

EILEEN

I know you can't. Want to grab a beer?

HOWARD

Sure, why not. It's been a long day.

They get in Eileen's car.

6 INT. WALTERS' CAR - NIGHT

6

Walters drives his car down a deserted road through the woods. He talks on his cell phone.

WALTERS

Hey, Quinn. It's me. I just flew the coop.

Howard pulls the bundle of cash out of his briefcase and tosses it on the dashboard. He laughs.

(CONTINUED)

WALTERS

Ohh. I cannot tell you how much of
a relief it is!

7 EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

7

Walters' car drives past a car on the shoulder of the road that appears to be abandoned.

After Walters' car passes, the abandoned car starts up and drives off behind him.

8 INT. WALTERS' CAR - NIGHT

8

Walters continues to talk on the phone. A pair of headlights have now appeared behind Walters.

WALTERS

No, I got all that. I got it!
Quinn, will you quit worrying about
me? I'm gonna be fine!

The headlights have grown closer. Walters sees them in the rear view mirror.

WALTERS

Yeah, Quinn, I've got to go. Um...
don't call me, I'll let you know
when I'm settled. Okay?

Walters hangs up his phone and watches the headlights.

Both cars begin to accelerate.

Because Walters is watching his mirror so closely, he doesn't notice the sharp turn in the road.

Walters crashes his car.

9 EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

9

The second car comes to a stop where Walters' car ran off the road. A KILLER gets out of the car, looks at the scene for a moment, then gets back into his car and drives off.

10 INT. WALTERS HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 10

The phone RINGS. Abigail answers it.

ABIGAIL
Hello? It's done? Good.

Abigail hangs up the phone.

11 INT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT 11

Howard and Eileen sit in a booth, talking.

HOWARD
Really, I can't give you a comment.

EILEEN
I know, I don't care. Not my story.

HOWARD
So...?

EILEEN
Ever since I got promoted I'm not really a journalist anymore. I just read whatever they put in front of me. I'm curious, is all.

HOWARD
Alright, then. Off the record. This guy didn't just get lost on his way to work.

EILEEN
How so?

HOWARD
So many rumors he's been cooking his books and now all of a sudden he just vanishes? You know I didn't find any cash anywhere in his house? He had an empty safe in his closet? This little birdie flew the coop.

EILEEN
I wish you wouldn't do that.

HOWARD
What?

(CONTINUED)

EILEEN

I was an English major, alright?
Clichés physically hurt me.

HOWARD

Whatever. My point is... on the
other hand, it leaves the wife in
the lurch. And he's got a ten
million dollar life insurance
policy.

EILEEN

So he's faking his own death?

Howard shakes his head.

HOWARD

Can't collect on the insurance
unless there's a body. Makes my job
easy.

EILEEN

How's that?

HOWARD

We just wait a while. If we find
him and he's dead, the wife did it.
If we don't find him, he did it.

EILEEN

What if you find him and he's
alive?

HOWARD

Then they're both idiots.

12

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

12

Walters, disoriented and badly injured, stumbles through the
woods.

WALTERS

Help!

Walters stumbles and falls, gets back up, and continues
walking.

WALTERS

HELP!!!

Suddenly, a hand reaches out of nowhere and bashes Walters
over the head with a rock.

(CONTINUED)

Walters falls to the ground. He breathes, but does not move. Above him in the sky, there is a tiny but bright pinprick of light. This is MARS.

EILEEN (V.O.)
...anyone with information on the whereabouts of Marshall Walters should contact the police department immediately.

13

INT. TV NEWS STUDIO - NIGHT

13

EILEEN
And that's all for tonight, we'll see you in the morning for News 2 at five and six. Good night.

The "ON THE AIR" sign turns off. Eileen gets up and takes off her microphone.

Eddie enters from the control room.

EDDIE
Good show. You're taking the weekend off, right?

EILEEN
Yep.

EDDIE
Okay, see you Monday.

Eileen grabs her coat and heads for the door.

An ASSISTANT rushes up to Eddie and hands him a fax. He skims it, then calls out to Eileen.

EDDIE
Not so fast.

Eddie hands Eileen the fax. She skims it, then rushes back to the desk. Eddie hurries back into the control room.

Eileen Quickly clips her microphone back on and checks her hair.

EILEEN
Okay.

Eddie speaks to her through the intercom.

EDDIE (O.S.)
Got a press conference.

EILEEN
What?

EDDIE (O.S.)
Introduce the press conference. On
the satellite.

EILEEN
Okay.

The studio lights come up.

EDDIE
Five seconds.

Eileen nods. Seconds later, the tally light on the camera
winks on and Eileen begins to speak.

EILEEN
Good evening.

14 EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

14

Walters, still unconscious, still lies on the ground.

EILEEN (V.O.)
We interrupt our scheduled
programming to report this breaking
news: NASA has just announced that
the rover Darwin has located life
on the surface of the planet Mars.
To repeat that, uh, NASA has found
life on Mars.

Suddenly, he is bathed in a very bright beam of light.

The trees around him begin to quake.

He mutters incoherently.

WALTERS
I don't wanna go to jail. The
money's in the backpack.

EILEEN (V.O.)
We now take you live to a press
conference at NASA's Jet Propulsion
Laboratory in California.

15 INT. JPL PRESS ROOM - NIGHT - TV BROADCAST 15

A NASA SCIENTIST stands at a podium in a small, dumpy conference room. He seems disoriented, and he is further hindered in his speaking by a barrage of camera flashes.

NASA SCIENTIST

I want to be perfectly clear in that although this is very likely one of the most important scientific discoveries of the last hundred years...

16 INT. HOWARD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 16

Howard sits at his kitchen table, looking through files on Walters. The TV is on in the living room.

NASA SCIENTIST (ON TV)

...the life we are talking about here would probably be very boring to a layperson. They are microbial, single-celled organisms.

(he smiles, in spite of himself)

But they're alive. And we've seen them move.

Howard smiles lazily.

HOWARD

What do you know about that.

Howard flips to a new page in the file. Suddenly, the power in his apartment goes out.

HOWARD

Bahh!

A STUMBLING and CRASHING are heard.

17 INT. EILEEN'S CAR - NIGHT 17

Eileen drives down a dark street. There are a pair of headlights behind her, growing slowly.

EILEEN

(singing)

This land is your land, this land is my land, From California to the New York Islands...

(CONTINUED)

Eileen eyes the headlights with concern. The headlights are now growing exponentially.

EILEEN

As I went walking that ribbon of
highway, I saw above me that
endless skyway...

The headlights are now enormous and engulf the entire car in a blinding white light.

EILEEN

(still singing, but terrified)
This land was made for you and...
me...

FADE TO WHITE

18 INT. TV STUDIO - MARS

18

Walters gradually gains consciousness. Looking down, he discovers that he is wearing a microphone.

Still bleeding from the head, he sits in a chair on a TV sound stage. Apart from himself, the studio is abandoned. A few cameras are set up, unmanned, and trained on Walters.

A POTATO wired up with electrodes sits on a chair opposite Walters.

Walters regards the potato with concern.

Suddenly, the studio lights come on. Walters is momentarily blinded.

THE ENGLISHMAN (V.O.)

It's time...

TITLE ANIMATION: NANO BRAIN BATTLES

Planets zip around on erratic paths like burning insects, occasionally running into each other and exploding. The title NANO BRAIN BATTLES emerges from a quasar.

INTENSE HELIUM VOICE (V.O.)

NANO BRAIN BATTLES!

Now completely disoriented, Walters tries to stand up, only to discover the he has been belted into his seat. He struggles, but only achieves in falling over in his chair.

(CONTINUED)

THE ENGLISHMAN emerges from the shadows at the corner of the stage. He is tall, wears a three-piece suit, and carries a handheld microphone. He speaks into the microphone, and his voice reverberates through the studio.

THE ENGLISHMAN
Welcome to Mars, Marshall!

WALTERS
What's happening?!

The Englishman walks up to Walters where he lies on the floor and stands over him, speaking to him.

THE ENGLISHMAN
Let me explain.

Walters nods expectantly.

THE ENGLISHMAN
I am a human being.

WALTERS
Oh.

THE ENGLISHMAN
And you have been brought back to Mars in order to determine if you are smarter than this Earth potato.

Walters is dumbfounded.

THE ENGLISHMAN
I am now going to ask the contestant a series of questions!

THE ENGLISHMAN
First question. If?

All goes silent as the Englishman waits for a response.

Walters, still strapped in his chair and lying on the ground, looks around in confusion.

A bulb wired to the potato lights up, and a CHIME sounds.

THE ENGLISHMAN
That's one.

WALTERS
I'm sorry... where am I?

THE ENGLISHMAN
Mars. Question two....

19 EXT. SKY - DAY

19

Howard wanders across a backdrop of endless blue sky.
Eileen enters and walks up next to him.

HOWARD
Hi.

EILEEN
Hi.

They walk in silence for a moment.

EILEEN
This is nice.

HOWARD
Well... I suppose. If you're into
this sort of thing.

20 INT. TV STUDIO - MARS

20

Walters continues to answer questions. He's really getting
into it now.

THE ENGLISHMAN
Question ten.

WALTERS
Yes!

THE ENGLISHMAN
It's a big one.

WALTERS
I'm ready!

THE ENGLISHMAN
What is the meaning of life?

WALTERS
Don't get caught.

There is a pause.

(CONTINUED)

THE ENGLISHMAN

Judges?

A BLEATING SHEEP is heard from off-stage.

THE ENGLISHMAN

Thank you. Well, Marshall, the tally is finished and....

Walters eagerly awaits the answer.

THE ENGLISHMAN

Turns out you're smarter than a potato. Just barely. Now--

WALTERS

Yes!

THE ENGLISHMAN

You can stop here, OR you can go on to the lightning round.

Walters considers for a moment.

WALTERS

The lighting round.

THE ENGLISHMAN

Oh, we do enjoy hearing you say that!

(muttering to Walters)

The Martians are big game show fans, and they hate to have a show end without a suitable climax. Just because they're tiny doesn't mean they're stupid.

(back to his stage voice)

Your NANO BRAIN CHALLENGE is this:

WALTERS

I'm ready.

THE ENGLISHMAN

Both contestants will assume their starting positions. On my mark, Marshall, you will have to kill and eat the potato.

Walters is horrified.

WALTERS

No....

(CONTINUED)

THE ENGLISHMAN
You agreed to it.

WALTERS
No!

The potato and Walters are escorted to opposite corners of the studio.

Walters is shaking.

WALTERS
I'm not going to do this.

THE ENGLISHMAN
I think you should know, Marshall,
that your wife arranged all this.

Walters is shocked.

WALTERS
What?! Abigail?

THE ENGLISHMAN
She wanted the insurance money.

Walters screams and charges at the potato.

21 INT. WALTERS HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

21

A podium has been erected in the Walters living room. Various members of the press are assembled in front of it.

Abigail Walters walks up to the podium and addresses the crowd.

ABIGAIL
Hello. I'm sure you all have a few questions, but we're all in a hurry and so I'll be brief. I was successful in the contract murder of my husband, so I'll be getting not only all of his money, but also a large insurance settlement. I'll take a few questions.

The reporters clamor to be called on. Abigail points at REPORTER ONE.

REPORTER ONE
Mrs... sorry--Ms. Walters, how do you feel about all this?

(CONTINUED)

ABIGAIL
I have to say I feel pretty good.

REPORTER ONE
No shame or recrimination?

ABIGAIL
Nope. Just lots of money. Yes...
you. Eileen.

Abigail points to a ghostly apparition of Eileen.

EILEEN
But Marshall Walters isn't dead.
He's just on Mars.

ABIGAIL
After consulting with my legal
team, we discovered that in the
world of insurance law, there's no
difference between being dead on
Earth and alive on Mars. One more
question.

REPORTER TWO
Are you sure you don't feel guilty?

ABIGAIL
No. To reiterate, I don't feel
guilty, I feel very, very rich.
Thank you all for coming, please
don't mark up the floor, I just had
it waxed.

22 EXT. SKY - DAY

22

EILEEN
So the wife got away with it.

HOWARD
Yep

EILEEN
That's discouraging.

Howard looks around suspiciously.

HOWARD
Do you ever get the feeling....

(CONTINUED)

EILEEN

What is it?

HOWARD

I shouldn't say it.

EILEEN

No, it's just the two of us here,
you can say it.

HOWARD

Do you ever get the feeling we're
just being fucked with?

Eileen stops and thinks.

23

INT. TV STUDIO - MARS

23

Howard, driven into a frenzy of blood lust and self-loathing, has smashed the potato into a paste and rubbed it all over his face.

He kneels on the studio floor and cries.

WALTERS

Abigail!

The Englishman emerges from the shadows.

THE ENGLISHMAN

Very good, Marshall! VERY good.
There's now only one challenge
remaining. The Ultimate Challenge.

WALTERS

How could you do this to me? It was
a good potato! It never hurt
anyone!

The Englishman advances on Walters.

THE ENGLISHMAN

The challenge is to--

Walters tackles The Englishman to the ground and begins choking him.

WALTERS

I don't want to know what The
Ultimate Challenge is! I already
know enough! I ALREADY KNOW ENOUGH!

(CONTINUED)

Howard and Eileen enter. The watch Walters choking The Englishman. They make no move to stop him.

The Englishman dies.

Howard and Eileen applaud politely as Walters stands and wipes the tears from his eyes. He turns and sees Howard and Eileen.

WALTERS

Howard!

HOWARD

Hi, Marshall. Very nice work.

Howard produces a piece of paper from his back pocket.

HOWARD

I have here a piece of
correspondence from the Martians:

Dear Marshall, Thank you for a
terrific program. We have conferred
amongst ourselves and have decided
that the only proper way to repay
you is to make you our God. Please
return to Earth, secure in the
knowledge that no matter what, et
ceterea, et cetera, you're the God
of Mars.

Walters is resolute.

WALTERS

I'm gonna kill that bitch.

24

EXT. WALTERS HOUSE - MORNING

24

Walters, now holding an ax, walks purposefully up the walkway to his front door. He flings the door open and is suddenly face-to-face with Abigail.

ABIGAIL

Marshall! How...?

Walters raises the ax, then thinks better of it and drops it on the ground.

WALTERS

See, the thing about potatoes is
that we think we're smarter than
them because we say a hell of a lot

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WALTERS (cont'd)
more. But maybe the potatoes are
smarter than us because they know
when to keep their mouths shut.

Abigail stares in shock at her husband.

ABIGAIL
Marshall, I--

WALTERS
Abigail, I want a divorce.

Walters turns and walks away. He calls over his shoulder:

WALTERS
Now that I'm alive again you're
going to owe a lot of money to the
insurance company.

Satisfied, Walters walks off down the street as his wife is
mobbed by reporters (including Eileen).

Walters smiles a peaceful and knowing smile.

THE END